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LETTER TO COMMISSION  
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TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: January 24, 2012

SUBJECT: Development Review Process Stakeholder Committee

The purpose of this Letter to Commission (LTC) is to inform you of a new user committee established by the Building Department. The Development Review Process Stakeholder (Stakeholder) Committee has been called together to provide insight and input on the building development review process, inclusive of the permit application, plan review, and construction inspection process. The City departments included in this process include the Building, Fire, Planning and Public Works Departments. The committee includes developers, architects, plans expeditors, and other interested parties.

The first Stakeholder meeting was held on Monday, December 5, 2011. Attendees included Les Beilinson, Mahli Lee, Alfredo Gonzalez, LA Glickman, Scott Robins, Todd Glaser, Judy Schottensstein, Robert Arkin, Russell Galbut, Sandor Scher, Michael Larkin and relevant City staff. The second Stakeholder meeting was held on Tuesday, January 17, 2012. Attendees were the same group from the first meeting, plus Jeff Weiss, Jeff Weinstein and Irene Arditi. The City Manager also attended this meeting and gave comments to encourage good dialogue and exchange of ideas.

During the meetings, the Committee was brought up to date on recent initiatives undertaken to improve the permitting process and accountability in the department, including the replacement of key software for the tracking and issuance of permits, the implementation of the Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) system, and electronic plans review. Process improvements, including a manual of policies and procedures (now available online), and changes to the fee structure were also discussed. Staff also apprised the Committee of key staffing developments, including the hiring of the new director, an "ombudsman" position who acts as a facilitator for those unfamiliar or experiencing problems with the department's procedures, and the current recruitment for an Operations Manager.

Other recent initiatives discussed were the planned implementation of payment kiosks (similar to ATMs) in the Building Department to help relieve lines and to implement key finance reforms, the placement of high ranking department officials in the lobby area to serve as on-the-spot problem solvers, the ongoing development of a plan review guide, and the use of complaint and spot audits to hold plan reviewers and inspectors accountable. Staff also reported on the adjustment of plan reviewer's schedules to decrease "down time" for the reviewers while waiting for the first "walk-thru" reviews.

At both meetings, members of the Committee expressed their desire to have greater accountability, consistency, accuracy and transparency in the process. Criticisms regarding the slowness of the plan review process, including the need for multiple submissions and


reviews by the same trade, with new comments first raised during later rounds of reviews, were raised. The need for simplified processes for permit applications was a consistent theme, as was the need for thoroughness during the first round of inspections. Staff recognized these as valid concerns, and discussed plans to address each of them with increased accountability for department employees through increased "audits" of plan reviews and inspection results as a means of monitoring this activity.

It was mutually agreed that sub-groups of the Committee, including staff, would be created to address different issues raised by the group. Each sub-group would meet separately and come back with concrete proposals for change. Three sub-groups were created. Staff will be represented in each group:

- A. Walk-Thru Process Improvements/Simple Permits Window. Since a great deal of the Building Department's resources are dedicated to the daily walk-thru process, this group will discuss ways to improve this process, and also how to create a "simple permits window" which will allow certain permit types to avoid longer wait times.
- B. Private Providers. This group will explore the feasibility of increased utilization of private providers throughout the development review process.
- C. Regular Plans Drop Off Improvements. The Department Director stated as a goal his desire to offer quicker turnaround times for different types of permits depending on their complexity, rather than placing all "regular drop offs" in one queue. If the public has options like 2, 5 or 10 business day turnarounds based on the type of permits, increased utilization of the drop off system should relieve pressure and backlogs elsewhere in the system. The Committee agreed with this assessment and this sub-group will be helping to develop new, reasonable guidelines.

The Stakeholders have agreed to meet on a monthly basis. The sub-groups will meet more frequently with targeted goals ranging from one to three months for concrete change recommendation and implementation. We will continue to keep you informed after each Development Review Process Stakeholder Committee meeting.

Should you have further questions regarding this matter, please contact Stephen Scott, Building Director, at x6824.

JMG//ss